



**With plenty of positives, Joaquim Rodrigues and C.S. Santosh set to tackle the second half of the Dakar**

**La Paz, Bolivia January 8:** Hero MotoSports Team Rally might be the youngest team in the Dakar paddock, but the results of the first week indicate that it has punched way above its weight in the fight against the big boys of the rally-raid circuit.

With the first half of the 2017 edition of the Dakar behind it, the two riders, Joaquim Rodrigues and C.S. Santosh, have given the team plenty of positive takeaways in a race that is being hailed as the toughest Dakar in South America till date.

The biggest surprise so far has been the performance of Rodrigues, who is running in 11<sup>th</sup> position in the provisional overall general classification just 1 hour 10 minutes 20 seconds behind the leader at the half way mark. The Portuguese rider has been on pace and spot on with navigation right from the start on January 2.



The highlight of his debut appearance in the Dakar has been the consistency and maturity with which Rodrigues has handled some of the toughest stages in the rally so far where many other seasoned riders have faltered.

Santosh, who is making his third appearance in the Dakar, too has a number of positives to look back on. Barring the third stage, when he paid a heavy price for missing a way point, India's top cross-country rider has enjoyed a consistent race on most of the days. Currently placed in 70<sup>th</sup> position in the provisional overall general classification, Santosh will be relying on his experience and knowledge of the Dakar to move up the order in the second half of the rally.

More importantly, both the riders have managed to avoid heavy crashes in the five stages so far, which is a big psychological boost going into the second half of the Dakar.

The most important aspect of Hero Motosports Team Rally's first Dakar campaign has been the rock-solid performance of both the bikes. Even at altitudes in the Bolivian Altiplano, where other bikes have struggled with performance in the thin air, the Hero Speedbrain 450 Rally has delivered flawless performance. After a trouble-free first week in the rally, the team is confident that both the bikes will make it to the finish podium in Buenos Aires on January 14.

**Dr. Markus Braunsperger, Chief Technology Officer, Hero MotoCorp:** I am really happy and proud of what our team and the riders have achieved so far in its rookie year. The bikes are performing very well and the riders have done a great job of getting back to the bivouac every day. There is no pressure on them. At the half way mark of the Dakar, we are in a good position and I am very confident that the team will have a good second week.

**Mr. Wolfgang Fischer, Managing Director, Speedbrain GmbH:** I am quite happy with the way things have shaped up in the first week of the Dakar. It's very satisfying to see both the riders in top shape physically, without any injuries. The bikes are also in good shape. These two aspects are the most important thing in a rally like the Dakar. The second week is also going to be pretty hard and the weather forecast shows more rain in the days ahead before facing the heat again. Having come so far with good results, barring one bad day for Santosh, both the riders need to maintain their composure in the days ahead.

**Joaquim Rodrigues, Portugal (Comp No: 27):** My first week in the Dakar has been really good and I am in a good position right now. To be honest, it has been better than I expected. I am really happy for myself and Hero Motosports Team Rally. It's good to get to La Paz safe and sound. The bike has performed very well and the team has done a great job of looking after the bikes at the end of each day. Now, the target is to finish the race and reach Buenos Aires.

**C.S. Santosh, India (Comp No: 42):** It has been a mixed first week. Missing the waypoint on the third special, which I think was the toughest stage so far, has pulled me down in the classification. On the other days, I have ridden pretty well and it reflects in the stage timings. I am happy to reach La Paz, the half way point of the Dakar, without any injuries. There is still a lot of distance left in this rally and I will try to make up some more time. But the first objective is to reach the finish podium in Buenos Aires.

**Provisional Overall General Classification after 6 stages\***

1 Sam Sunderland	Red Bull KTM Factory Rally	KTM	15:22:05
2. Pablo Quintanilla	Husqvarna Factory Rally	Husqvarna	15:34:05
3. Adrain Van Breven	Yamaha Official Rally Team	Yamaha	15:38:12
<b>11 Joaquim Rodrigues</b>	<b>Hero Motosports Team Rally</b>	<b>Hero Speedbrain</b>	<b>16:32:25</b>
<b>70. C.S. Santosh</b>	<b>Hero Motosports Team Rally</b>	<b>Hero Speedbrain</b>	<b>21:23:57</b>

\*Note: The 6<sup>th</sup> stage of the 2017 Dakar was cancelled due to bad weather.